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British Psychology and the Media: Cyril Burt at the BBC

R. Michael Chamarette

Any balanced assessment of Cyril Burt's historical significance needs to transcend older genres of the 'Burt Affair' and of the 'great man', with their emphasis upon Burt's agency and influence within the theory and practice of psychology in Britain in the early and mid-twentieth century. In line with more contemporary approaches, Burt provides a case study that addresses the wider question of how psychological thought and practice mediated understanding of the self, and the intersection of differing views of human nature with a range of social, economic, political and ethical issues. In particular, there are issues of the nature of psychology, the authority of its exponents, and its relevance to the anxieties and aspirations of the British public during the interwar period. Two themes exemplify this – public confusion of psychology with Freudian psychoanalysis and both with the study of sex, and secondly the role psychologists as public scientific intellectuals. Any omission of Burt from these broader considerations risks distortion of our understanding of both psychology and of Britain during this period.

COMMEMORATION of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sir Cyril Burt falls this year. Arguably the most controversial British psychologist and public scientific intellectual of the early and mid-twentieth century, some reflection on his significance and legacy is apt. Yet, to an extent usually associated with politicians, many older, technical histories presented conflicting and extreme visions of Burt ranging from that of a hero to a perpetrator of scientific fraud, and any definitive, widely agreed resolution still remains elusive. In the tradition of the nineteenth century historian Thomas Carlyle, his agency or influence upon events was represented as positive and decisive, a 'great man' of British psychology (see Fletcher, 1987). Even negative, counter-narratives also regarded Burt's influence as decisive, though undesirable. Contrastingly, it is argued here that, like most historical figures, Burt's life and legacy must be considered in shades of grey and discussed within the wider social and cultural context of the period. Psychology has a social and cultural history, as well as these older, more restricted technical accounts. The nature of the 'new psychology', how it could be distinguished from medicine or philosophy, and the practical contribution that it could make was anything but distinct in the minds of the interwar public. The role of Cyril Burt provides a compelling and illustrative case study of these issues, though far from providing a comprehensive account. Before doing so however, some of the issues raised within older accounts are outlined.

Received interpretations of Burt

For decades following his death at the age of 88 any reprise of his repute, either positive or negative, would have seemed unnecessary. Initially, as his obituaries suggested, he was lionised as one of, if not *the* major British psychologist and public scientific intellectual of the early and mid-twentieth century, despite the justifiable claims of others such as Charles Myers, Frederic Bartlett, William McDougall, Susan Isaacs, or Charles Spearman. Validation was provided by claims for his shaping of educational public policy, establishment of educational psychology, influence within the field of intelligence and its assessment, and in the study and treatment of 'maladjustment'. Considered seminal were his contributions towards influential educational advisory committees in the interwar period, advancement of the use of

intelligence tests conceived as a meritocratic form of selection for grammar school places, and position as the architect of the Education Act, 1944, interpreted as shaping secondary education in England for decades afterward. Burt's appointment in 1913 at the LCC as the first recognised, salaried psychologist was understood as establishing British educational psychology (see Wooldridge, 1994). In 1933 Burt succeeded Charles Spearman as professor of psychology at UCL, and there both developed the 'London School' of statistically influenced psychology (Hearnshaw, 1964). Burt embraced much of Spearman's thinking on intelligence such as that of 'g', a general factor of intelligence, but expanded this into the study of hereditary intelligence. As for Burt intelligence was essentially biological, a largely inherited mental instinct, then understandably he applied the biometric statistical thinking of the hereditarian statisticians Karl Pearson and Ronald Fisher to its study. His interests also extended to 'maladjustment' and delinquency in young people where Burt blended aspects of broadly psychoanalytical treatment with physiognomy. His *Young Delinquent* of 1925 was influential amongst teachers and social workers, ran to many subsequent editions, and Burt actively promoted the work of the Child Guidance movement in Britain (see Stewart, 2013). The award of a knighthood in 1946 seemingly recognised these multifaceted public contributions. In the post war period, Burt's lifelong equation of civic merit with high IQ was reflected in his inspiration of Mensa, he served as one of its early presidents, and he continued to publish prolifically in the two decades between his retirement and his death. His influence did not cease abruptly following his passing but was perpetuated by his numerous students. Though Hans Eysenck is better known, Jack Wright, first president of the Association of Educational Psychologists, was also influential.

Within five years of his death, however, Burt and his legacy were embroiled in controversy, the 'Burt Affair' that comprised very public allegations of fraud and professional malfeasance. The major charges were that his data on the hereditability of intelligence were questionably fraudulent, and that his collaborators in some published papers, his 'Vanishing Ladies', at best made no contribution at the time, and at worst were fictitious. His assertions of professional primacy in the application of exploratory Factor Analysis techniques were seen as spurious, and professional malfeasance in his dealings with colleagues alleged. Until the recent admission by the Dutch psychologist Diederik Stapel of scientific fraud on an industrial scale, Burt was regarded as the major exemplar within the discipline, and though initially supportive, even Eysenck publicly described Burt as a 'Psychopath' (Eysenck, 1983). Though intelligence and 'race' had not been Burt's primary concern, his hereditarian apprehensions were extrapolated following his death by Arthur Jensen and others to this area with predicably controversial consequences. The tension between these differing accounts of Burt, on the one hand as a 'great man' and on the other as exemplifying possible scientific fraud, endures in the historical literature. Unusually, a recent account of key figures in psychometrics omitted any chapter on Cyril Burt at all (Forsythe, 2019). Space precludes the squaring of this historiographical circle.

More recently the extent of Burt's involvement with British eugenics has also drawn adverse comment. Burt's discipleship of Francis Galton, the founder of the creed, possibly contributed to his adoption not only of the latter's hereditarian researches towards individual differences in intelligence but also the ideological eugenic agenda within which this was intertwined. Whilst in the published literature the full and precise details of how eugenic influence mapped onto Burt's research awaits further clarification, there seems little doubt about his active commitment to the British Eugenics Society and professional involvement with his fellow eugenicists especially before 1945

(Mazumdar, 1992). Whilst emphatically not defending eugenics, it is important to recognise that it was supported at the time by a wide assortment of public figures and researchers other than Burt (see Bland & Hall, 2010, 215; Mazumdar, 1992; Kevles, 1995). Whilst there are few overt mentions of eugenics in Burt's published works, as the recognition of eugenic tropes was widespread, at least in some circles, typically this was unnecessary prior to 1945. Viewed, however, especially through the lens of the Holocaust, it fell from public favour in the post-war world. Controversially, Burt's work was more than hereditarian – it was an expression of a British eugenic ideology (Rose, 1985).

A fresh perspective

The focus in this paper is broader however than narrow and disputed accounts of Burt's agency within the theory and practice of psychology. How during the last century before Burt's death did psychological thought and practice mediate understanding of the self, and the intersection of differing views of human nature with a range of social, economic, political and ethical issues? Public confusion was widespread as to what psychology was, its subject matter, and how it was distinguished from other investigations of the mind or spirit. The interwar period arguably marked the demarcation of psychology as an independent discipline, rather than intimately associated with psychoanalysis broadly conceived, psychiatry, philosophy, or for that matter psychic research and folk wisdom. A public able to access psychological knowledge directly from their own experience, common sense, or from self-help movements had no need for professional psychologists such as Cyril Burt. If psychology was a science, then what kind of science was it and from whence did professional psychologists derive their authority? Of course, these historical themes are too extensive to be considered here, though contemplated by Mathew Thompson (Thomson, 2006). However, they contextualise Burt's role as a public intellectual between the two World Wars. Whilst the contributions of scientific public intellectual in Britain before about 1970 has been discussed in the historical literature, that of psychologists has been relatively sparsely covered, though in addition to Thomson there are several other commendable exceptions (see Wooldridge, 1994; Rose, 1985). The candidature of Pear at Manchester, or of Susan Isaacs for this role between the wars is undeniable, though debatably it is Burt who presents the strongest case, through his attempts to 'scientise' and clarify public understanding of psychology as an autonomous and useful discipline, as distinct from common sense that was readily accessible to all without professional mediation. Through his public lectures, letters to newspapers, contributions towards journals, and not least his broadcasts on the then new medium of the wireless, Burt confronted public anxieties such as juvenile delinquency, 'mental deficiency', aesthetic taste, public morals and sexuality. To our contemporary ears the terminology used has the capacity to shock, but in Burt's defence, this was historical 'actors language', the parlance of the time and is considered in this way rather than endorsed.

Two themes, illustrative of these wider issues during the interwar period, are outlined here. Psychology was confused widely with psychoanalysis, and both disapprovingly with the study of sex and public morality, and Burt engaged with this issue without embarrassment. Matters had not been improved by the reinterpretation of Freud by British public intellectuals and writers such as Havelock Ellis, D.H. Lawrence and the Bloomsbury Set (Richards, 2000, 197, 203). Overy claimed that Burt was hostile to psychoanalysis reflecting its popular public image as carrying 'the unwholesome odour of moral decline and social anxiety' (Overy, 2010, 151). Yet Hearnshaw, as Burt's biographer, dismissed his involvement with psychanalysis in only a few sentences (Hearnshaw, 1979, 81). A brief vignette below exemplifies the theme.

The engagement by psychologists as scientific public intellectuals with BBC radio and communication with its large but unseen audience represents a second theme. Leslie Hearnshaw largely ignored this aspect, and with only rare exceptions such as Adrian Wooldridge and Richard Overy, there are few extensive accounts of Burt within the social and cultural historical literature in the interwar period (Overy, 2010; Wooldridge, 1994). The literature of the governance and organisation of the BBC ignored Burt (Desmarais, 2016; Briggs, 1965). The social history of Scannell and Cardiff mentioned Burt only to emphasise that some academic broadcasters were concerned by the possible reactions of their colleagues if they provided simple answers to complex questions, and unemployment and Foreign Affairs were their main concern (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991, 169). The genre exploring the contributions of women staff members at the BBC, such as *Behind the Wireless* that described Mary Somerville, Hilda Matheson, and Mary Adams, does however mention Burt (Murphy, 2016). Burt's papers together with the record provided by *The Listener* archives and the popular press provide insights, as does the commentary by Allan Jones (Jones, 2010).

Vignette on psychology, psychoanalysis, and sex

On 23 September 1922 the curiosity of readers of the letters section of *The Times* would have been piqued by a letter from Archdeacon J. Malet Lambert. Concern was expressed that at a recent annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science proposals were made to establish psycho-analytic methods in schools. Yet he felt psychoanalysis was a scientifically unproven 'cult', and '… young teachers will now be required to saturate their minds with pornographic detail set forth with a particularity greater than that required for a medical student.' The Archdeacon thought the introduction of psychoanalysis, with its preoccupation with sex, into British schools represented a threat to the moral and spiritual well-being of teachers, children, and of the nation (Malet Lambert, 1922). There was editorial support from the *The Times* in the same edition noting that no other system of 'psychology' had shared such popularity. Two days later Cyril Burt, as Secretary for the Psychological Section of the British Association responded. He challenged inaccuracies of fact and of interpretation. This had been a joint meeting of the Educational and Psychological sections of the Association to discuss '…both the merits and the dangers of psychoanalytic doctrines…' at which none of the speakers were 'exponents of the strict Freudian school' and where no such proposal had been made (Burt, 1922,). Those who spoke were psychologists and educationalists of 'moderate views and established reputations'; the epithet 'pornographic' was inappropriate for either psychoanalysis or psychology. These psychologists were not louche, or guilty of sexual impropriety, but rather of 'established reputations' (*Ibid).* Not just here but elsewhere in his role as a public psychologist-intellectual Cyril Burt defended psychoanalysis and psychology from their confusion in the public mind and from perceptions that both were obsessed with sex.

Archdeacon Lambert was accurate at least in discerning an influence within education of psychanalytic views. Of 16 educational journals surveyed by Rapp between 1911 and 1919, 10 of these published 46 articles on psychoanalysis, many written by psychoanalysts themselves rather than journalists (Rapp, 1990, 237). These authors argued that psychoanalysis provided parents and teachers with alleged insights into the unconscious conflicts, desires and feelings of young children that were unattainable by any other means. Burt's own position with respect to psychoanalysis is disputed. If as Overy claimed Burt was hostile (Overy, 2010), then his lifelong defence of it is surprising. Wooldridge acknowledged Burt's work on childhood neurosis, but his implication was that Burt was 'eclectic' rather than strictly Freudian in his approach. (Wooldridge, 1994). All these interpretations were based partly upon Burt's BBC radio broadcast in 1946 on 'The Human Mind'

and his 1934 lecture 'What's Wrong with the New Psychology?' to the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society (Burt, 1946; Burt, 1934). The latter however can be understood, not as evidence of Burt's hostility, but of his support of psychoanalysis (see also Rapp, 1990, 236). It was the public rather than Freud who had confused psychology and psychanalysis and both with the study of sex (Burt, 1934).

In 1946 Burt returned to BBC radio with his talk on the Human Mind. Almost a quarter of a century after his exchange with Archdeacon Lambert and the related editorial in *The Times*, he revisited mischievously the themes of public confusion about the distinction between psychology and psychoanalysis and the differentiation of both from the study of sex. As a prelude to his talk, Burt scripted a dinner party playlet in which his protagonists expressed confusion on these points, reflecting wider public misunderstandings that he addressed subsequently.

WIFE: ….' James what is psychology? Charles says it's the study of spooks, Daphne says it's the study of sex, and Harry says it's just a pack of nonsense.
MALE VOICE: Sex? Oh, that's psycho-analysis. Psychology is just the study of consciousness: the psycho-analysts study your unconscious. (Burt, 1946).

Burt went on to address the perplexity of his protagonists, emphasising the need for expert interpreters such as himself. Reference to 'spooks' suggested that Burt felt that psychology was also confused in the public mind with psychic research, another of his interests. Whether or not this is evidence of Burt's hostility to psychoanalysis is debateable. It seems a social satire reminiscent of Evelyn Waugh, or Noel Coward highlighting public confusion, engaging with a non-specialist audience, and illustrative of his theme. Beyond the script itself, there are no additional indications of Burt's intentions in his letters and papers, and consequently the question remains open. Wider issues are also raised about Burt's role as a scientific public intellectual, the public face of psychology, in his radio talks in the interwar years at the BBC.

Cyril Burt at the BBC

BBC Marconi Type A Microphone, c.1930s.

As the national radio broadcaster between the World Wars, the public educational ethos of the BBC reflected concerns after the First World War that the educational system had served the population badly, and that for many their education had been limited to basic skills (Briggs, 1995, 173.). The perception of a 'knowledge gap', especially for the newly enfranchised voters, men over 21 and women over 30, was influential. John Reith, Director-General of the BBC, charged the newly founded organisation to 'inform, educate and entertain' their audiences (Ibid). The committee that Reith appointed to advise him under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Hadow reported in 1928 and recommended the establishment of a Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education to oversee policy and programming. Although Burt informed and entertained in his broadcasts, the 'education' in psychology that he provided was, as will be seen, questionable.

Radio broadcasting and publishing expanded rapidly. The BBC held a monopoly on public broadcasting, and licence holding expanded from just over two million in 1927 when it became a public corporation, to over nine million by 1939. Although initially ownership of a wireless was an indicator of prosperity, the expansion of potential listeners was considerable. These figures represent *households* rather than individuals, so the numbers accessing radio broadcasting were at least twice

or three times this. Ninety-eight per cent of the population were estimated to be able to listen to at least one BBC station by 1935 (Briggs, 253). The BBC was also the publisher of the *Radio Times* and *The Listener* magazine with weekly circulations of 2.4 million and 52,000 respectively in 1935. However, their readership differed with *The Listener* targeting the more intellectual. Burt was popular with both radio audiences and with producers at the BBC (see Hearnshaw, 1979, 189). Reporting of his talks in the BBC's *Listener* magazine, and postal responses from the listeners themselves suggested a positive audience response. Burt's repeated invitations to speak suggested that initially he met Reith's requirement to 'inform, educate and entertain'. The broadcaster prized his ability to promote an interest in psychology, his skills in a purely verbal medium of communicating complex information and ideas to a non-specialist and unseen audience, together with his ability to please, entertain and demonstrate the relevance of theoretical as well as practical aspects of psychology to the lives and concerns of his audience (Hearnshaw, 1979, 216).

The working relationship between Burt and Mary Adams, his producer, is part of a broader story. Adams, herself a science graduate, produced many of Burt's radio talks between 1930 and 1936, and more generally was responsible for the format and style of presentation of science talks. These adult education broadcasts were transmitted during prime listening time such as the early evening, and were intended to appeal to all listeners, though additional resources providing background and reading material were available, or after 1929 published in *The Listener* magazine (Jones, 2010). Scientists providing the talks spoke directly to their audience, without the mediation of presenters or journalists. After 1931 the British economic and political crises that led to the formation of a coalition National Government informed adult education broadcasts. Burt, however, engaged with national 'Decline', the perception rather than the actuality of British social and moral decline, and a preoccupation of eugenicists (English, 2001).

Prior to joining the BBC in 1930, Adams delivered a series of six radio talks on 'Problems of Heredity' in 1928 (Adams, 1929). The following year Adams presented five eugenically inspired talks entitled 'A1 or C3? The Future of the Race'. Like Burt, Adams was a eugenicist, in fact a senior member of the Eugenics Society and in her own broadcasts at least she sought to promote eugenic themes (Jones, 2011). Burt's career was not, however, dependent upon any eugenic cronyism. Both the BBC and Adams held strong views on who had 'a good radio voice', and Burt exemplified this (see Bowler, 2009, 211; Jones, 2011, 968). Mainstream broadcasts were not a medium for lecturers but could stimulate the listener into wanting to know more. Adams wanted talks that demonstrated how the process of gathering information and testing hypotheses worked for practical issues (see Bowler, 2009). Moreover, Burt's own broadcast career at the BBC was not confined to Adam's period as a Talks producer from 1930. He delivered his initial talk on 'Mental Growth' on 15 June 1927 as part of the series on 'The Development of Mind and Character'. His next talk on 'The Psychology of the Bad Child' was on 28 January 1929 (Burt, 1929). Both predate Adams appointment in 1930 and Burt continued to broadcast well into the 1950s, long after Adam's departure from the BBC Talks department in the late 1930s. However, the six years following the launch of *The Listener* in 1929 were remarkable for science at the BBC largely because of Adams as a producer (see Bowler, 2009).

Burt's major contributions formed part of 18 broadcasts by himself and others entitled *How the Mind Works*, broadcast between October 1932 to February 1933 (Burt, 1933). Although Burt's presentation was suffused with his eugenic hereditarian beliefs about human ability, there was little direct or controversial discussion of eugenics itself. Like other eugenicists on both sides of the Atlantic, Burt deployed medical metaphors such as 'diagnosis' and 'laity' to enhance the authority of his presentations. People where defined and shaped by their genetic, and

hence largely immutable, intelligence. Even temperament, or 'personality' was founded on instincts (Burt, 1943). In his *Listener* article on 'Intelligence Tests', readers were left in no doubt about mental measurement as Burt viewed it. Intelligence was an '…inborn, all-round intellectual capacity' that could be tested easily and accurately (Burt, 1930, 849). Burt reinforced his hereditarian message with photographs of the facial features of two little girls: a 'Mongolian' (Down's Syndrome) and a 'Cretin' illustrating different types of 'Imbecile', those who scored poorly on tests of intelligence. Such notions of 'stigmata' and physiognomy, the visual and often facial signs of 'sub-normality', dated from the nineteenth century (Collins, 1999). Burt *implied*, rather than stated, that as in his view tragic outcomes such as Mongolism and Cretinism were entirely avoidable through improved 'mental hygiene' and sound eugenic policies, then these should be implemented. For Burt both such unfortunate individuals themselves and the nation would benefit (Burt, 1930). Eugenically based social anxieties about 'mental deficiency', national degeneration, disease, and criminality were evoked and associated, but without explicit elaboration. Even those not already disposed towards eugenic anxieties and solutions were primed to be receptive to them, even though this was not openly acknowledged.

This was characteristic of Burt. In the same issue within 'Character Studies from Portraits', Burt provided a table of 'correct' judgements to experimental tasks contained in the pamphlet accompanying his talk on 'The Study of the Mind'. From portraits and specimens of handwriting from four children, listeners were asked to estimate their 'characters' rated on scales from 'A', the highest, to 'E' the lowest 5 per cent. Two boys provided a contrast in intelligence whilst two girls a contrast in 'temperament' (Burt, 1930). Burt's book *The Young Delinquent* afforded similar judgements (Burt, 1925). Psychologists such as himself were able to diagnose these social ills, identifying and separating those of 'good' intelligence and temperament from the 'socially undesirable'.

In discussion programmes rather than talks Burt's eugenic convictions proved more controversial. By 1930 Eugenic Society policy asserted that no couple had an absolute right to parenthood (see Mazumdar, 1992). 'Negative' eugenic policies designed to restrict or prevent the reproduction of those regarded as of the 'social residuum' or 'unfit' biologically to reproduce reflected this. In 1935 Burt chaired a radio debate between Bertrand Russell and G.K. Chesterton on the motion that 'Parents are Unfitted by Nature to bring up their own Children'. The archival transcript of Burt's summing up records that he stated that 'not only are some parents quite unfit to bring up their children; they are equally unfit to have any' (Burt, 1935). Burt alluded here to this Eugenic Society policy. The broadcast itself omitted Burt's summary, as did the published version (*The Listener*, 1935). The *Manchester Guardian* under the by-line 'Chairman Faded Out' explained that the time allocated to the debate had expired, a silence lasting about two minutes preceded the announcement of the next feature, and this could have been used for Burt's summing-up. Burt stated that he did not want to discuss the matter publicly (*Manchester Guardian*, 1935).

What was the nature of Burt's professional expertise as a public intellectual at the BBC? No distinct answer can be given. On the one hand Burt suggested that if psychology shared the methodology of the hard sciences such as physics, then it must be the same kind of study. On the other, his own self presentation in his broadcasts, utilising anecdotes and case histories without details of his sources, and the dispensing of wisdom, suggested the manner and authority of a family doctor (Burt, 1929). More significant is the type of intellectual authority that Burt claimed for his own expertise and vision of psychology. Self-referentially, his own status as an 'expert', as in the hard sciences, was taken to verify what he said. Psychological knowledge and practice were the province of the expert like himself, rather than a matter of common sense or the popular mass psychology of the

day (c.f. Thomson, 2006). Thus Burt, like other scientific public intellectuals, presented himself as a portal through which details of his professional knowledge flowed towards his unseen public audiences.

Burt's conviction of the superiority of the 'expert' to the man in the street extended to aesthetics, an attractive theme to his audience and readers the *Listener*. The subject had interested him from his days at Oxford, and he worked closely with Margaret Bully for one of his talks in the series 'How the Mind Works' in the early 1930s (Burt,1933, 294). Both Burt and Bully considered that aesthetic judgments were objective, universal and quantitative, and could be arranged along a continuum from bad to good 'taste'. Good taste was a matter for elite experts, rather than common sense. Bully explained the thinking behind the experiments in her book *Have You Good Taste?* (Bully, 1933). Extending this, Burt summarised his own views in his book based on his original talk, also called *How the Mind Works*. 'Beauty' was universal, objective and existed rather than being an invention of the human imagination. Burt claimed to demonstrate that the expert felt and found more 'beauty' than the ordinary man or woman. For an initial survey linked to his BBC talk, Burt invited his audience to write in summarizing nine judgments of the artistic merit of pairs of objects such as jars, teapots, and chairs illustrated in the *Listener* (Burt, 1933, 294). He received over 6000 responses that were compared to the judgments of six art 'experts' who agreed which of the paired objects were ranked as 'superior'. This degree of audience participation was unusual for the period and indicates the seriousness with which Burt's talks were regarded by the listening public. Subsequently Burt asked a sample of over 600 children and adults to rank order 50 picture postcards ranging from depictions of works by 'Old Masters' to cheap birthday cards (*Ibid*). The results were compared to the opinions of 11 art 'experts. He concluded that there was an objective, universal quality about artistic judgment possessed by the 'expert' that others lacked by degree.

The expert interpreter was required in aesthetics as well as psychology or physics. In the preface to his *How the Mind Works* Burt challenged the notion that for 'the plain man' psychology was just common sense. An expert such as himself was an essential guide to the subject just as in physics. The expert in psychology or in 'good taste' such as himself was a member of an elite in possession of knowledge and sentiments that were denied to the man in the street (Burt, 1933, 8). Psychology and its implications for society and its problems required professional, expert interpreters such as Cyril Burt and could not be entrusted to the layman. In Bowler's terms of the popularisation of science, Burt demonstrated the transformational power of psychology, and its practical applications, also supporting Bowler's own argument that early twentieth century scientific intellectuals were top-down in their communication of science (Bowler, 2009).

How successful was Burt in 'informing, entertaining and educating'? Undoubtedly, Burt entertained. Hearnshaw described Burt as popular with both radio audiences and with producers at the BBC (Hearnshaw, 1979, 189). Burt's exploration of 'good taste' was notable partly because of the strength of the public response, but also because here as in other talks Burt used pre-printed material in the *Listener* to interact with his audience. Despite the questionable objectivity and representative nature of much of the material, he 'informed' his audiences of the significance, as he saw it, of an immutable and genetically determined 'intelligence' and of 'temperament' founded upon instincts. Eugenic anxieties were reinforced, although typically they were not articulated overtly.

The *educational* content of Burt's talks was disquieting. What it means to 'educate' was and remains contested. Mary Adams however wished the popularisers of the talks that she produced to educate by demonstrating how scientists thought, and solved problems. To what extent did Burt exemplify this? His public vision of heredity, mental deficiency, aesthetics, and of psychology was question-

able. Yet Burt does not seem to have been challenged professionally on the psychology that he dispensed with such panache at the BBC. An archival survey of Burt's letters and papers has not suggested the potential for censure from his colleagues as a concern for him. Yet colleagues were few in number and many knew Burt professionally if not personally. By 1939 there were only six chairs of psychology in Britain, and a total lecturing staff of only 30 (Hearnshaw, 1964, 208). Even those who might have been critical had little or nothing with which to work upon as Burt did not share publicly the sources or original data that he used and his professional authority as a scientific public intellectual was largely unquestioned at the time. Adams' requirement of a window onto the thought processes and problem solving used by scientific psychologists was however absent from Burt's talks. For Burt, there were elites in both aesthetics and intellect, and they rather than the general populace would explain and arbitrate upon their social implications.

Burt's legacy?

Does the life and legacy of Cyril Burt still matter today? Whilst much historical research could be dismissed in this way, debatably this question carries particular force here. The Britain of the inter-war period has long since ceased to exist, and 50 years after his death only psychologists aged over 70 would have experience of Burt directly, if at all. Other questions such as the replication of many classic and more recent experiments within psychology may appear more pressing (see Ritchie, 2020), and many students may find the history of the craft irrelevant largely to their concerns. Yet Burt's significance stems in part from the historical interlinking of the technical, internal history of the subject with the wider public scientific understanding of psychology. Here Burt provides a valuable case study and arguably to an extent not encountered with other figures of the time. Separated from a focus mainly upon the allegations of fraud and malfeasance, or the interpretation of Burt's agency as decisive as in the 'great man' genre, fresh insights are achievable, though only a brief indication is realistic here, and Burt was not the sole historical actor in this period.

Though only mentioned briefly here, at the heart of the critiques of Burt's work is the issue of replication. Not simply in his technical, but also in his more public pronouncements Burt's data or results were often incomplete or absent, rendering precise replication of his work a virtual impossibility. The principles and practices of the new psychology of the period needed to be distinguished in the public mind from other disciplines and indeed from plain common sense, and explication provided of its significance for moral anxieties and visions of how British society ought to be construed. For Burt, in psychology as in aesthetics professional mediation and interpretation by experts was essential to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings. In terms of the BBC's requirement to 'inform, entertain and educate', Burt was successful in meeting these criteria bar the last. What Burt presented to the listening public largely reflected his personal construction and perspective of the 'new psychology', often infused with implicit eugenic tropes of civic worth ranging from an elite to those less favoured. The extent to which this reflected the processes and problem solving of psychology regarded as a science in the first five decades of the twentieth century remains questionable. The intention of this paper is however less to adjudicate on this as to emphasise the importance of Cyril Burt to our understanding of British psychology, the media and society in this period. To ignore Burt's role risks distorting that understanding.

Dr R. Michael Chamarette (unaffiliated).
Email: rmc12@tutamail.com

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